1 July 2010

## News from the Fen

Welcome to the July edition of **News from the Fen**, the community newsletter for the National Trust's Wicken Fen Vision.

Packed with interesting articles and news, the Newsletter is delivered quarterly to households in villages surrounding Wicken Fen and the Vision lands, elected representatives and key stakeholders, to keep the public informed on the development of the Wicken Fen Vision and activities at Wicken Fen.

Highlights this issue include:-

**Fen Cottage Garden Restored – (Front Cover)** Young Visitors help restore the vegetable garden of historic Fen Cottage as part of Trust's Food Glorious Food Initiative.

**Reach Lode Bridge Nears Completion (Page 2)** – Join us at our Community Celebration on 12 September to mark the opening of the Reach Lode Bridge - a vital element of the Lodes Way opening up vast areas of the countryside for exploration and adventure.

**Wicken Fen the Perfect Place to Summerwatch (Page 3)** BBC Springwatch presenter and Wicken Fen Vision Patron, Chris Packham, stresses the importance of engaging children with nature this summer.

**Lets go Wild! – (Page 4&5)** – Whether your eight or eighty there's something for everyone at Wicken Fen this summer- nature walks, paddleboarding, den building, dragonfly safaris, boat trips, teddy bears picnics, bird watching....the list is endless.

**Avocets & Agriculture (Page 6)** A little over five years ago Tubney Fen was a turf farm. Today it is a haven for rare and endangered birds whilst at the same time providing high quality commercial grazing

**Meat the Neighbour (Page 6)** – We meet our neighbour, Jonny Fuller whose high quality beef and pork is sold in the Wicken Fen café.

**Where There's Muck (Page 7)** – We catch up with Pete Stroh who has the smelly and somewhat messy task of studying seed dispersal via our grazing animal's dung.

We hope you enjoy keeping up-to-date and reading all about our activities at the Fen. Your comments and suggestions for future articles are always welcome. Have a great summer.

*Howard Cooper*

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# News from the Fen

THE COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER FOR THE NATIONAL TRUST'S WICKEN FEN VISION JULY 2010

## Young visitors bring Fen Cottage garden back to life

*Fen Cottage garden has had a makeover thanks to enthusiastic young visitors*

Young visitors have helped to re-instate the cottage garden of Wicken Fen's historic Fen Cottage.

The project was part of the National Trust's Food Glorious Food initiative to encourage children and their families to grow and eat their own fresh produce.

The children helped weed and dig over the borders and planted lettuce, beetroot, parsnips and beans and recycled pasta and yoghurt pots to make decorative flower pots. Children were also given packets of salad, carrots and thyme seeds to grow at home.

"The aim was to show just how fun and easy it is to grow fantastic tasting food" says Learning Officer Fiona Symonds. "You don't need a big garden – its amazing what you can grow on a tiny plot or in pots and hanging baskets".

Wicken Fen volunteers also produced a series of recipe ideas using plants growing in the cottage garden like rhubarb and rose petal jam and lavender sugar.

The crops will eventually be harvested and served in the Wicken Fen café, giving a food mileage of around 40 yards as opposed to the many hundreds of miles travelled by supermarket fruit and vegetables.

**There's masses to see and do at Wicken Fen this summer, details on pages four and five, plus special events on the back page. Read what BBC Springwatch's Chris Packham thinks of Wicken Fen on page three.**

## Reach Lode bridge nears completion

A giant crane dominated the skyline to lift the central span of the new Reach Lode bridge into position at the end of May. Work on the bridge – together with a new two kilometre cycleway across Burwell Fen – will continue over the summer. A community picnic and barbecue to mark the official opening of the bridge is planned for Sunday, 12 September. The bridge and cycleway is a major step in the development of the Lodes Way, a virtually traffic-free route linking Wicken to Anglesey Abbey and Bottisham, which is due to open during 2013.

Structural engineering consultants Price & Myers have been awarded a contract to design a new bridge providing access for walkers, cyclists and horse riders across Burwell Lode.

## Wicken Fen Highly Commended in Accessible Britain Awards

The Wicken Fen team is celebrating after being highly commended in the first ever Rough Guides Accessible Britain Awards. Wicken Fen was nominated in the Best Active Venue Category.

In making the Highly Commended shortlist, Wicken Fen has been recognised as one of the top tourist attractions in the UK for providing accessible, inspirational and inclusive days out for people with disabilities.

The judges recognised that Wicken Fen, has achieved a near impossible task – making the fens wheelchair accessible. The walks, most hides and amenities are all fully accessible, which allows people to get face-to-face with nature. Judges commented that being able to engage with nature is a pleasure that is denied to many – thankfully Wicken Fen enables people of all abilities to get out and enjoy their surroundings.

The awards coincided with publication of the third edition of The Rough Guide to Accessible Britain and were presented by adventurer and TV personality Ben Fogle at a reception in London's Tate Modern.

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*(L-R) Ben Fogle joins Isabel Sedgwick and Chris Soans from Wicken Fen and Ian Goswell from Motability at the awards ceremony*

# Wicken Fen's the perfect place to summerwatch, says Chris

*BBC's Springwatch presenter Chris Packham is Patron of the Wicken Fen Vision. Chris visited the Fen recently to film dragonflies for Springwatch and he's looking foward to a fabulous wildlife summer...*

Wicken Fen is a wonderful oasis in the landscape and home to a staggering diversity of life. Birds, butterflies, moths, dragonflies and plants – the list of species is amazing and few places are as well studied or as well cared for. Wicken Fen is a really valuable conservation "ark" and it's the core area from which the Wicken Fen Vision is steadily expanding its horizons.

Perhaps even more importantly Wicken Fen is very accessible and it's an ideal spot for visitors of all ages to engage with nature and wildlife. To help as many visitors as possible get face-to-face with nature, a great programme of events is organised each year, with walks, talks, boat trips and focused days which attract beginners and experts alike, all keen to explore the area's hidden gems.

And the most important bit is... you really don't need to be an experienced naturalist to join in. You may meet some from time to time but all you really need to bring with you is some enthusiasm and plenty of curiosity to learn more about the wealth of wildlife on offer. Sometimes a raincoat, some wellies and binoculars or a camera can come in useful ! You don't have to pack sarnies and a flask though as the excellent café is on hand for all refreshment needs...

It's particularly important to encourage young people to meet nature face-to-face too as these days such opportunities have been stolen from many other parts of their life. Watch your children's faces as they sort through all the colourful jewels that emerge from a moth trap, or as they sit entranced by the emergence of an adult dragonfly on the edge of the pond dipping areas, give them a chance to hear and maybe glimpse a cuckoo or a grass snake as it slips across the Lode or the pale flash of a barn owl as it drifts across the fen.

Wicken is a great place to visit whether it's for family fun or exploring some remarkable aspects of ecology. For me it's right up there as one of my favourite places in the whole of the UK. So please come along and join in, Wicken Fen is open to everyone and your support will help to secure the future of this unique place.

Chris Packham
Patron Wicken Fen Vision

## Fiona joins the team at Wicken Fen

**We recently welcomed Fiona Symonds our new Learning and Interpretation Officer to Wicken Fen.**

**Cambridge born and bred Fiona is delighted to be working at Wicken Fen where she enjoyed many happy family outings as a child. A Botany graduate, Fiona is enthusiastic to share her passion for the countryside and nature to help children learn and explore the natural world.**

**Previously Fiona worked for the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers teaching unemployed youngsters traditional countryside skills such as hedge laying and dry stone walling in North Yorkshire and teaching children from inner London schools about wildlife in an urban environment.**

More events on the back page... More events on the back page... More events on the back page... More events on the back page...

# Summer at Wicken

**School's out (or it soon will be) and a summer of fun and adventure is lined up at Wicken Fen. Whether you're eight or 80 there's something for every one – nature walks, den building, pond dipping, geocaching, boat trips, bird watching, paddleboarding, Teddy Bear's Picnics and more. There's so much to see and do we may have to try and extend the summer holidays! So bring your granny and grandad, dog, bicycle, picnic, binoculars, hat and plenty of sun cream and go wild at Wicken Fen this summer.**

**Wildlife Detectives**
Hunt for clues to discover the amazing wildlife of Wicken Fen
Monday 2 August (6+ years)

**Den Building Day**
Build your very own hideaway on the fen.
Wednesday 4 August
Drop in from 11am -3.30pm

**Fen Pirate Day**
Follow the treasure Trail, hunt for monsters and create some swashbuckling craft
Friday 6 August & Monday 23 August. Drop in from 11am - 3.30pm (allow 2 hours)

**Bugs and Slugs**
Dig around the undergrowth to discover some of the amazing minibeasts of the Fen
Monday 9 August

**Teddy Bears Picnic**
Bring along your favourite teddy for stories, craft and furry fun.
Wednesday 11 August

**Lucky for Some**
Have fun with old wives tales and try your luck at our fen folklore and trail.
Friday 13 August

**Dragons and Damsels**
Discover all about these fascinating creatures and make your own dragonflies to take home. Monday 16 August

**Butterfly Flutterby**
Find out who is fluttering through the Fen.
Wednesday 18 August

**Fairies, Pixies and Trolls**
Make spells and hunt for slimy boggles. Friday 20 August

**Mud Glorious Mud**
Get messy and create some prehistoric mud monsters.
Wednesday 25 August 10.30am – 12.30pm

**Crafty Capers**
Drop in for craft activities from 11am – 3.30pm.
Friday 27 August.

**All events cost £4.50 per child and run from 10.30am to 12.30pm or 2pm to 4pm unless indicated. Advance booking essential as spaces are limited – telephone 01353 720274 for tickets and information.**

# n Fen – lets go wild!

## Fiona's Five

Learning Officer Fiona Symonds' top five suggestions for a great family day out at Wicken Fen.

**Take to the Water**
Enjoy a trip on our traditional fen lighter along beautiful reed lined Wicken Lode or try your hand at Standup Paddleboarding if you're more energetic: 45 minute boat trips run Thursdays and Weekends throughout the summer holidays – adults £3.40 Child £1.80. Standup Paddleboarding every Wednesday £15 per hour including board and tuition.

**King of the Castle**
Climb the staircase to the top of the Tower Hide, the highest point on the Fen. Enjoy the stunning views and fantastic birdwatching.

**Walk this Way**
Walk the Adventurer's Trail for a chance to see Wicken's herds of highland cattle and Konik ponies or walk along the Lodes to the riverside Five Miles from Anywhere pub for a quiet drink.

**Hunt Dragons**
Pond dip for dragonfly larva and be dazzled by the magical flying displays of Wicken's 21 species of dragon and damselflies. Pond dipping every Tuesday 12 – 3.30 pm £1.50 per 30 minute session.

**Hide and Seek**
Explore hidden parts of the Fen searching for our mystery geocaches. Download the co-ordinates from www.geocaching.com or hire a GPS receiver from the Visitor Centre

One more suggestion...
**Fiona's Favourite**
Why not round of your day with an ice cream sundae and slice of home made cake in the Wicken café – well why not, you're on holiday!

See you soon... *Fiona*

## Avocets and agriculture: rare species delight bird-watchers on Tubney Fen

Sightings of rare wading birds including avocet, temminck's stint and whimbrel have been reported on Tubney Fen, near Reach.

Tubney Fen was a turf farm prior to being bought by the Trust a little over five years ago. Conservation work undertaken by the Trust includes the creation of a mere and species rich grassland, which provides high quality seasonal grazing for local graziers.

*Avocets are breeding successfully on new Wicken Fen Vision habitat at Tubney Fen.* (image Jeff Harrison)

A new bird viewing facility overlooking the mere, enabling visitors to view the birds without disturbing them, was constructed over the winter months. Avocets normally breed in the shallow coastal lagoons of East Anglia. Three pairs successfully bred on Tubney Fen for the first time last year.

At the time of going to press, nine avocet chicks had hatched.

# Meat the neighbour...

Running along the Wicken Fen's northern boundary is Spinney Abbey Farm which has been farmed by the Fuller family since 1892.

Today the farm is run by Jonny Fuller who produces high quality beef and pork, which is sold in the Wicken Fen café – we went along to the meat our neighbour (please excuse the pun).

Jonny Fuller runs a herd of 92 traditional English Longhorn cattle, known for the high quality of their beef, and 50 free range Gloucester Old Spot pigs on his 142 acre farm next to Wicken Fen. He is rightly proud of his animals, especially his prize bull Henry, which won Best Native Bull at the recent Pymoor Show.

Keen to expand his herd he has recently taken a lease to graze Oily Hall, near Lode which was purchased by the Trust in 2007 as part of the Wicken Fen Vision. Oily Hall has been sown with a flower rich grass mix providing excellent habitats and food for wildlife, particularly moths and butterflies, and excellent grazing for Jonny's Longhorns.

*Jonny Fuller's Longhorn cattle live next door to Wicken Fen. You can try his top quality meat in the café*

Jonny is passionate about the welfare of his animals. He provides them with a diet of high quality grass supplemented by natural feed, such as carrots and sugar beet pulp in the winter. He personally drives them to the local abattoir so they remain calm and are not stressed.

His high quality meat is sold at a number of outlets including Scott Brothers Farm Shop, Witchford, Griffins Country Store in Ely and the Five Miles from Anywhere Inn at Upware, whose restaurant also serves Jonny's meat. He also attends Burwell Farmers Market every second Saturday of the month. Jonny's meat features on the Wicken Fen menu and our popular summer barbecues and fits nicely with the Trust's policy to sell local, high quality, seasonal produce.

He is keen for young and old alike to understand how and where their meat is produced and runs open farm days each year. To find out more about Jonny's farm and meat sales see www.spinneyabbey.co.uk.

# Where there's muck...

*Scientist Pete Stroh is researching how plant seeds are distributed by grazing animals, including in their droppings*

A familiar but not entirely pleasant odour is accompanying a novel experiment currently underway at Wicken Fen.

Pete Stroh, a researcher in wetland creation and monitoring based at Anglia Ruskin University has been seen on numerous occasions wandering the fen with bucket and shovel in hand collecting samples of fresh dung from our herds of Konik ponies and Highland Cattle.

The messy task is for research on the potential for plants and specifically their seeds to disperse from species-rich areas of the ancient fen to adjacent land which has been acquired as part of the Wicken Fen Vision.

Seeds may be dispersed in a number of different ways; airborne on the wind, floating in water, hitching a ride on passing animal's feet, fur or feathers, or being consumed and then later expelled in animal's dung. Grazing animals are generally not fussy eaters, and won't think twice about consuming herbs and grasses with seeds attached as they make their way through the vegetation. These seeds will then be contained within the animal, passing through the digestive tracts before being expelled up to three days later.

To test which species have the capacity to retain their ability to germinate following digestion by cattle or horses, Pete is running a germination experiment in the greenhouses of the Cambridge University Botanic Gardens. Dung collected by Pete is placed into seed trays and grown on for six months, with the seedlings identified and counted as they emerge.

So if you catch the whiff of manure at the Botanic Gardens this summer, it may not be just for the roses.

# Wicken Fen Visitor Centre gets a makeover

The Wicken Fen Visitor Centre has undergone a transformation to enhance facilities for our visitors. Access to the Fen has been improved with automatic doors and a new section of Boardwalk. The large glass doors provide sweeping views of the Fen from the Visitor Centre.

The gift shop has been refitted enabling us to increase our range of local crafts, foods and drinks, books, green products and gifts.

A number of beautiful solid oak benches hand created by local Wicken craftsman Jamie Cakebread have been located around the Fen, providing the perfect opportunity to rest, enjoy the atmosphere and soak up the sights and sounds.

events@wickenfen

## Get afloat with boat trips

Wicken Fen's boat trips run to 26 September, every Saturday and Sunday plus Bank Holidays. Trips depart at 11.30am, 1pm, 2.15pm and 3.30pm.

Saturday 3 & Sunday 4 July, 11am & 2.30pm
Saturday 24 & Sunday 25 July, 11am & 2.30pm
Saturday 28, Sunday 29 August & Monday 30 August
11am & 2.30pm
**Dragonfly Safari Shows**
Discover the amazing dragon and damselflies of Wicken Fen. Adult £8, child £5

Sunday 11 July, 2pm
**Summer Wildflowers and Wildlife**
Go deep into the fen to discover rare fen flora and fauna. Adult £6.50, child £3.25

Friday 30 July, 9am & 2pm
Saturday 18 September, 9am & 2pm
**Paddleboard Safari**
Enjoy a three hour guided exploration of the local waterways under your own steam. £50 per board.

See pages 4 and 5 for summer holiday children's activities

Saturday 7 August, 10.30am
**Koniks and Cattle**
Discover our Konik ponies and highland cattle with Carol our Grazing Warden.
Adult £6.50, child £3.25 (age 7+ please)

Saturday 14 August, from 7.30pm
**Summer BBQ and Twilight Safari**
Enjoy a BBQ of local food followed by a twilight safari with Wicken's Wardens. Adult £18, child £15

Saturday 4 September, 10.30 – 4.30pm
**A Fenman's Day**
Spend a fascinating day with eel catcher and working fenman, Peter Carter. Set eel traps and experience some harmless wildfowling – including the chance to witness a rare punt gun in action.
£40 (includes lunch)

Friday 10 September, 10.30am
**Pram Push and Toddler Waddle**
Painting and craft for pre-schoolers. Child £3.75

Sunday 19 September, 10.30am
**Cycle Safari**
Join our Wardens for a bike ride to explore cycle routes through the Vision lands
Free event

Sunday 26 September,10.30am
**Autumn Guided Walk with a Warden**
Enjoy the autumn colours and wildlife of the fen.
Adult £6.50, child £3.25

**Please book early to avoid disappointment as numbers are limited. For further information and to book please contact the Wicken Fen Visitor Centre, telephone 01353 720274.**

**The Wicken Fen Vision is supported by a wide range of partners including:**

Cambridgeshire County Council

South Cambridgeshire District Council

East Cambridgeshire District Council

Cambridge City Council

Natural England

EEDA East of England Development Agency

Greater Cambridge Partnership

Cambridgeshire Horizons driving forward sustainable communities

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